Historic, archived document

Do not assume content reflects current scientific knowledge, policies, or practices.

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE
Radio Service
OFFICE OF INFORMATION

HOMEMAKERS' CHAT WEDNESDAY, SEPTEMBER 4, 1940

(FOR BROADCAST USE ONLY)

Subject: "GARDEN QUESTIONS." Information from the Bureau of Plant Industry, U. S. Department of Agriculture. Farmers' Bulletin 1242-F available.

--ooOoo--

You wouldn't be likely to think of asparagus, rhubard, and horseradish all at once,- a vegetable, a fruit substitute, and a condiment. But today's questions on fall garden problems, answered by one of the plant scientists of the U. S. Department of Agriculture, reveal that all three of these food plants have points in common.

In the first place, all three are "permanent" residents of the food garden. That is, after you once get them started, they come up every year. All of them need rich, well-drained soil and plenty of moisture. And because they are all long-lived, producing for a number of years, it's a good idea to locate the beds off at the side of the garden, where they will not interfere with the cultivation of other garden crops.

But let's look at the different questions in turn. Here's the one about asparagus. "When do you plant asparagus? Do you plant seeds or roots or what? How large an asparagus bed do we need for our family of five?"

Quite an array of questions. W. R. Beattie, one of the horticulturists in the Bureau of Plant Industry who has answered so many of our plant queries, says that the time to start an asparagus bed is in the fall or early spring. You can plant seeds in the spring, but they take a year to grow, and after that it is necessary to wait two more years before you can get your teeth into any of the toothsome asparagus shoots. So you save time by buying some strong one-year-old plants or "crowns" from a nurseryman and setting them out while they are dormant. Even then you have a year or two to wait for asparagus on the table.

Don't let the plants dry out before you set them. Space them about 24 inches from each other in trenches 3 to 5 feet apart, in well-prepared, friable, fertile soil. Have the crown of the plants 4 or 5 inches below the surface, and the roots well spread out. Work fine soil in between the plants. Keep the rows straight so you can cultivate easily. You only work the surface of the ground and the spaces between the plants. You never disturb the roots.

When the asparagus plants have spent one winter in your garden--if you set out one-year-old crowns,- you may cut a very few stalks. But after the second year you'll be able to enjoy the asparagus for the full season- 5 or 6 weeks or longer. An asparagus bed usually continues in production for 18 or 19 years, or even more. For a family of five, a 12 or 16 foot square of ground, planted in trenches 3 feet apart, with plants set 2 feet apart, should be ample. And by the way, the Mary Washington variety is one of the most popular.

Now, the question about rhubarb. "My husband is very fond of rhubarb pie. Is rhubarb, or pieplant, easy to grow? What variety do you recommend?"

Mr. Beattie says that in the cooler parts of the country where rhubarb is adapted it is not at all difficult to grow. Rhubarb needs a climate where there is a moderate rainfall and where the ground freezes more or less during the winter. It doesn't grow well in most of the Southern States. But he also says that this lady can't count on any rhubarb pie out of the home garden next season, for, like asparagus, it takes rhubarb plants two years to reach the right condition for eating.

Plant rhubarb roots as soon as you can this fall, or early next spring, much as you would with asparagus, only space the hills farther apart. Get your rhubarb roots from someone who has already established good hills. Five or six hills will supply the average family with plenty of rhubarb for sauce and pies. You might set the hills along the garden fence where they'll be out of the way. Cultivate as you would asparagus- on the surface and between the plants, never going very deep. Keep the plants watered during dry periods.

Don't pull any stalks from the rhubarb hills until the second spring, and comparatively few before the third season. Then in about 7 years, you'll need to divide the plants and reset them, or they'll be too crowded and produce very thin, scrawny stalks.

The last question makes us think of roast beef with horseradish sauce, oyster cocktail, and maybe cabbage salad with horseradish-whipped-cream dressing. The writer says: "Last spring a friend gave us some horseradish roots and we planted them. Please tell us what care we should give the bed this fall, and whether to dig up the roots and store them or leave them in the ground."

And Mr. Beattie replies: "As a rule, people don't reset horseradish plants in the home garden each year, but simply allow them to grow in a cluster and remove the roots as they need them for the table. However, this method does not give as large or as tender roots as when the plants are set each year."

So Mr. Beattie believes in digging the horseradish roots in the autumn, removing the slender ones to plant next spring, and storing them in a box of moist sand. You can bury the box out-doors or keep it in a cool cellar. And in another box of moist sand you can store the larger roots you want for grating as a condiment.

Horseradish is like asparagus in that it requires a rich soil and plenty of moisture. But unlike asparagus and rhubarb, the roots are ready to use the first fall after planting.

Perhaps you have still other permanent plants in your food garden that need some attention this fall- berries, or grapes. The U. S. Department of Agriculture has a free Farmers' Bulletin, Number 1242-F, which gives information on planting and caring for a number of these fruits as well as asparagus, rhubarb, and horseradish.

More garden question in a few days.

#####